

SENATOR HALL: Debate ceases. Senator Schimek, to close on your amendment.

SENATOR SCHIMEK: Yes, thank you, Mr. President, members of the body. And thank you for the...I think the thoughtful debate that has occurred here this morning. I would like to try to recap what the amendment does. And, Senator Chambers, I want you to tell me if I'm wrong on the wording of the amendment now. What the amendment is, is to AM5732, on page 18, and the amendment would read, starting on line 2, the adults in the recipient family shall ensure that the minor children regularly attend school. Education is a valuable personal resource. Then it would strike the next sentence dealing with cash assistance being reduced and would insert, it is important that children of recipient families regularly attend school and that parents make every effort to see that they do. Then it says...it strikes out, it is the intent of, and says, the Legislature directs that a process be developed to ensure communication between the case manager, the parent or parents and the school to address issues relating to school attendance for children 16 years of age and younger. That is the way the amendment reads now, wanted to make sure that everybody understood what it said. You know I did not realize until about, oh, 15 or 20 minutes ago on this floor that these people that we're talking about can also be fined \$500 if their children don't attend school. And the more I thought about it, the more I thought we're really laying a good one on them here, not only would their benefits be cut, but they can also be fined \$500 if their children don't attend school. And I wonder if that's \$500 for each child, or \$500 collectively. I don't know, but I think this just compounds the situation and maybe we ought to look at that \$500 fine. That seems very large, particularly for some people whose income happens to be low, whether they're on welfare or not. I felt this was an important issue to bring to the body because I do think it's punitive. I would willingly, I would willingly accept the idea that is presented in this bill, if it applied to everybody on government assistance at the very least, or if it implied...if it applied to every child of every parent. I don't have a problem with Senator Bohlke's assertion that it should be a priority to have these children in school, all children in school, not just children of welfare parents. So I would encourage you to vote for the Schimek amendment and perhaps we can get on with the rest of the bill, of which I'm certain there will be equally stimulating debate. So, thank you very much.